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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA — 915 DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. — May 6, 1954 DATE

REF :

MA 1954

17 For Dept. Use Only	ACTION ARA-5	INFO DEPT. OCR/R-2 OLI-6 SY-2 "/OC-1
	REC'D 5/10	OTHER CIA-5

SUBJECT: Government Orders Blackout in Guatemala City.

Mr. Stephen A. Hammond Jr., President and General Manager of the largely American-owned electric light company Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala, informed me this morning that he had been summoned to the Ministry of Communications at 5 p.m. on May 5, 1954 where he was interviewed by Eduardo SANCHEZ Grijalva, Under Secretary of the Ministry, and Sr. Leopoldo RODRIGUEZ, Chief of the Ministry's Legal Section. Sr. Sánchez Grijalva told Mr. Hammond that the Government wished to conduct an experiment and desired that all current for Guatemalan City (but not outlying towns) be cut off on a signal which would be given between 8 p.m. and midnight that same night. Sr. Sánchez Grijalva said the blackout was to last for one minute.

Mr. Hammond told the Under Secretary that such an action by the Company would give rise to a flood of complaints and that suspending electrical current even for a short period was a serious matter. He added however that he would comply with the Under Secretary's request provided the latter would give him a written order which would protect his Company's position.

Mr. Hammond further explained that it would not be possible to cut all the switches at exactly the same moment since the city was divided into some 13 independent sections and that all the sections were not controlled from the same station. Further, he pointed out that it would not be possible to restore the current immediately at the expiration of 60 seconds; he estimated that the entire operation would take from 5 to 20 minutes.

Sr. Sánchez Grijalva agreed to give Mr. Hammond a written order and met him at a local hotel at 7:15 p.m. for that purpose. A copy and translation of the letter are attached. Mr. Hammond then gave him the name of the trusted employee of the Company to whom he could telephone. Sr. Sánchez Grijalva requested that the matter be treated as strictly confidential.

Lights in Guatemala City were actually extinguished at 9:40 p.m. and service was resumed from 5 to 20 minutes later

WLKrieg:rd
REPORTER

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in different sections. Mr. Hammond said that he made various efforts to ascertain from Sr. Sánchez Grijalva the nature of the "experiment" which the Government was attempting to carry out, but Sr. Sánchez Grijalva evaded his inquiries and gave no indication what the Government's purpose was.

As a pure speculation, Mr. Hammond referred to recent reports in the press regarding the operation of a clandestine anti-Government radio station which has been heard in this city beginning on May 1. Mr. Hammond thought that perhaps the Government was endeavoring to ascertain whether the station was in Guatemala City by cutting off the current to see whether it stopped broadcasting.

There is also a small possibility that Government officials may have thought that a blackout would be seized upon by revolutionary groups to start a movement and that the move was designed to smoke them out. In any case, no untoward developments have been reported as a result of the blackout.

William L. Krieg
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

Enclosures:

1. Government Blackout Order;
2. Translation thereof.

Government Blackout Order Received by President of Electric Company May 5, 1954

PALACIO NACIONAL
MINISTERIO DE COMUNICACIONES
Y OBRAS PUBLICAS
Republica de Guatemala, C.A.

Ref: CHAS/lrm

Guatemala, Mayo 5 de 1954

Señor Presidente de la
Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala, S.A.
Presente

Tengo el gusto de dirigirme a Ud. rogándole se sirva dar sus apreciables órdenes a efecto de que por espacio de sesenta segundos se corte simultáneamente en todos los sectores de la ciudad capital, el servicio de luz eléctrica, con el fin de efectuar cierto experimento que llevará a cabo el Departamento de Electrificación Nacional.

La suspensión deberá ser hoy, a la hora exacta que se le indicará telefónicamente.

Con todo aprecio, me sucribo de Ud. muy atento y seguro servidor,

/Illegible Signature/

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From ___

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Encl. No2
Desp. No.915
From Guatemala

Translation, Government Blackout Order Received by President of Electric Company May 5, 1954

NATIONAL PALACE
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND PUBLIC WORKS
Republic of Guatemala C.A.

Ref: CHAS/lrm

Guatemala, May 5, 1954

President of the
Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala, S.A.
Guatemala City

I take pleasure in communicating with you to ask that you be good enough to give the necessary orders to have electric light service cut off simultaneously in all parts of the Cpital for a period of 60 seconds, for the purpose of an experiment to be carried out by the National Electrification Department.

The suspension should take place today, the exact time to be indicated by telephone message.

I am, respectfully,
Very truly yours,